

SERIOUS and FRIENDLY

LETTERS

TO A

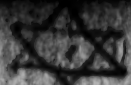
DEIST.

K Philochristus,



LONDON:

Printed for J. and J. RIVINGTON, at the
Bible, in St. Paul's Church-yard. MDCCLII.



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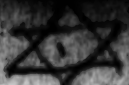
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ALPHABET (III) 1763

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E R R A T A

Page 5. l. 32. read *mind*. p. 13. l. 9. for *of* read
for. p. 20. l. ult. read *suspend*. p. 42. l. 2.
 read *this*. p. 57. l. 5, 6. read *soul body fortune*.
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(11)
Serious and Friendly

LETTERS

TO A

DEIST.

LETTER I.

My dear friend,

FOR such I can sincerely call you, notwithstanding the very great and material differences of opinion between us in matters of religion. God forbid, that these should extinguish that affection and regard, which is still due to you, as my fellow-creature, fellow-countryman, and acquaintance. However just the dislike be to the errors you have unhappily fallen into, you have a right to compassion and charity; and indeed, I know not how I can better express this, than by endeavouring to

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draw you from those errors. I can by no means think of giving your sect up in general, as obstinate and invincible. Many of you, I suppose, have been deluded for want of caution and proper enquiry; and such at least, if not those also, whom youthful passions have prejudiced against a doctrine, that restrains them, may, I hope, be recovered, if they will only be so just to themselves, as to attend with that seriousness, which the subject requires, to the considerations and counsels, which will here be offered.—My design is to bring together in one short view, several of the most weighty and affecting and useful arguments for our religion, and to apply them to your reason and conscience in the spirit of love and meekness. And the only motive of this address is that real concern of heart, which every good christian must feel at the view of so many instances of unguarded persons falling away from the faith of the gospel; and an hearty desire and humble hope of being an instrument in God's hands, (may He be pleased to grant His blessing and success) of restoring to you the only sure foundation for peace of mind in this world, and happiness in the next.

In an age of light and knowlege, when enquiry has been so much countenanced and encouraged; when the pretensions of our religion and the grounds of our faith have undergone the strictest examination; and when so many treatises

tises to prove its truth, and answer objections against it, have been published by the ablest of its professors; it may appear at first surprizing, that any person brought up in the belief of christianity, should, if this be true, be asham'd of it; or that mere sophistry, even with ridicule to help it, should be able to do that now, which no terrors or persecutions could do formerly. But, when we take all circumstances into our thoughts, this is really not to be wondered at. This is no consequence of free enquiry. In every age, many have been able to give reasons for their faith, which nothing can shake. And others have been perverted by scorn, which will often move those whom terror cannot. Nay sophistry, how contemptible soever, hath commonly greater weight than sound argument with minds that are biased and prepossessed. And how many prejudices have contributed to produce this apostasy, which you boast of, and we lament, will be shewn hereafter.

At present, let me only beg you to remember, that this very circumstance, was expressly foretold by the Apostles of our Lord, as what would certainly happen *in the latter days*, (2 Pet. iii. 3. Jude xviii. 1 Tim. iv. 1.) and surely then you cannot but reflect, that you are now ignorantly fulfilling these predictions, and consequently proving the veracity and authority of these first teachers of the gospel, thus enlightened

with the knowlege of futurity by The Holy Spirit of God.

I am very sensible, that persons, who doubt or disbelieve the christian revelation, are yet far from being in one and the same way of thinking; and hence I foresee a difficulty in using such reasonings, as are applicable to you all. Some have gone vastly farther in unbelief than others. And as in truth this is not a consistent scheme, some points advanced to promote it, have been absolutely contradictory to others. I will not suppose you in particular so far degenerated, as to deny the existence, the attributes, the authority, or the providence of God Almighty. These are all points to be presumed in this letter, which is addressed to a deist, a title, which implies the belief of these great truths, as well as the other articles of natural religion. You would resent any charge or suspicion of being a designed enemy to this, and would be understood to intend all your objections and opposition to the *necessity*, or to the *evidence*, of any farther revelation from heaven. This, I apprehend, is your declared tenet: And indeed this is bad enough, and what I must warmly and affectionately call upon you to review and retract.

Here then I take my stand to argue with you. Remember, that as a reasonable, you are an accountable, creature, bound to follow your true interest,

terest, which must ever consist in adhering to truth and virtue; that every wilful deviation from these, will expose you to God's indignation and punishment; that He has given you a natural conscience, which cannot but convince you of the essential differences between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, good and evil; and prepare you to look forwards with hopes or fears towards a future judgment, and another state of final rewards and punishments; and that He requires of you to act up to this light of your minds, and under a constant sense of these truths, and to pay Him that tribute of worship and service, which is due to Him as your Supreme Creator and Preserver.

If you deny any of these points, you cannot justly call your self a deist, nor pretend to be a friend to the religion of nature; you are then debasing your own dignity, and levelling your self with the beasts of the earth, living much like them here, and having no higher views than they hereafter; at the same time you are openly and directly weakening the obligations of civil laws, and disturbing the peace and welfare of all civil government, and spreading licentiousness, confusion, and misery through the world.

But if you really hold and maintain the points abovementioned, and wish the persuasion of them general, then I beseech you next to consider,

whether any scheme can so well secure and promote such a persuasion, together with all the happy consequences of it, as the gospel of our Saviour? And if christianity be most conducive to this purpose, whether you ought not even on this account to entertain sentiments in its favour?

To assist you in this important enquiry shall be the subject of my next letter. In the mean time, this will serve to shew you my views and intentions in this correspondence; which I hope you will consider, as proceeding from the compassion and good-will of,

Sir,

Your sincere friend and servant

LETTER II.

Dear Sir,

Without any farther introduction, I shall proceed to consider the point stated in my last.

It is the very lowest commendation to say, that no article of natural religion, no one virtue, is omitted or neglected in the christian. It is but common justice to say farther, that here they are all *best* taught and inculcated. Without some instruction, the generality of men could,

or

or at least would, know little of them: Without some instruction from heaven, probably not the wisest men could have known them all clearly: Several of the wisest among the heathens were certainly doubtful, if not ignorant, of many, which now appear to be of the very last consequence.

Let me beg you to stop a little here. Do you not see a plain and distinguishing excellence of divine revelation, which is itself a presumption of its truth?—But in another respect also, it must have the preference. What it teaches, it teaches as the direct and express law and command of God, consequently must come with the highest authority, and have, when attended to, great weight and influence on the conscience, sufficient to over-rule any temptation to the contrary. Whereas the best instructions of mere moralists, are to be considered as their advices and opinions only; what we may think our selves at liberty to comply with or reject, as we should please; however, what we have no stronger than prudential reasons of this life to oblige us to follow. And even supposing the sanctions of divine authority superadded, so far as reason can superadd them, which yet was done by few or none of the old philosophers; still neither will these sanctions be near so firmly believed, nor the points of practice, to which they are annexed, near so fully and undeniably ascertained, without a
 2 formal

formal declaration from heaven recorded and perpetuated in writing, as they may by the means of it—And if so, I may leave you yourself to determine, which of these two methods is most likely to reform the world?

It is therefore evidently the interest of natural religion, that the christian should be supported. In truth, this is built upon that, and has much explained and improved it. The moral law never subsisted in so full extent, and in such perfection, as it appears in the gospel of Christ.

If therefore you imagine the patrons of revelation any enemies to morality, you are under a mistake. We cannot indeed answer for every injudicious enthusiast, who may have idly represented these as at variance. But no sober and judicious christian can follow them in such an error—However, as we allow the necessity of morality, so far as it goes; so we cannot think it *alone* sufficient to answer all the wants of mankind, or to preserve that peace and satisfaction of soul, which every wise man must in the first place seek after.

This is a point, in which you greatly differ from us. But pray consider, before you hastily decide it, the present state of man, and the various necessities he is subject to. Consider, that he is a poor, weak, mortal, sinful creature, performing not without reluctance some acts of his duty, ever inclined to swerve from it, and too often

often transgressing against the light of reason in the most obstinate repeated aggravated manner. You cannot be ignorant, that this is more or less the case of men. The heathens felt and acknowledged it, but were ever at a loss to account for it. It was plain from experience, that reason never did guide men to the attainment of the true end of their being so uniformly as nature and instinct does the brutes. And the origin of moral evil, with which nature is so much connected, was a problem they could not solve. And I appeal to your self, whether you can suppose, that man came originally out of the hands of his Creator, thus prone and liable to sin; and whether our present degeneracy and corruption is not a strong proof and confirmation of the christian doctrine, that our nature is not in its primitive state? And therefore, without the help of Divine assistance to strengthen it, what can such frail and imperfect creatures hope to do, which can procure them any great favour or rewards from God? Nay indeed, as we have all acted much worse, than, notwithstanding our weakness, we might have done; without some express promises what security could we have from punishment? Had we then no sure hopes of assistance and pardon, who could ever be safe or easy? What due encouragement for our prayers or endeavours? What support against the terrors of death? Could our reason unassisted

sisted then give such *sure* hopes? Not, unless ~~the~~ could reconcile Infinite Justice and Mercy together, or pacify the indignation of Him, *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. Here therefore, every hope we could receive on the one hand would be balanced, would indeed be dreadfully overbalanced, by our just fears on the other. In such circumstances, what then could be done to relieve the guilty helpless mind from the distractions of doubt and despair? His repentance and future obedience could no way atone for what is past, even were it perfect. But this it can never be. And therefore he must be still farther from being certain of having his transgressions forgiven, and his weakness assisted.

These things, my friend, appear to be undeniable. And I think, you must on a review of them own this state of nature, in which without the supposition of a revelation we must all remain, to be a most uncomfortable and dreadful one, compared with that of revelation; and that nothing can be so truly desirable to such frail and sinful creatures, as the knowledge of an atonement made for our sins; by virtue of which we enter into a new covenant with God, and have clear promises granted us of pardon and grace, of the acceptance of our prayers and sincere endeavours, and of a title to glory and immortality. This, and this only, could dispel
their

their doubts and fears, and make them go on with true comfort and pleasure.

However, should I grant you, that men entirely ignorant of any revelation, would entertain some hopes of aid and favour, especially if they sincerely walk according to the best light they have; yet these hopes would be far from being clear certain and distinct enough to be the ground of sufficient comfort and encouragement—And farther, how can you hope for the like mercy, who labour under no such ignorance? You have still greater reason to be uneasy, who have the means of knowing a revelation, and yet reject it.

Indeed, however man might wish for this fresh light, he could hardly have promised it to himself, or entertain'd any well grounded assurances of it. And yet, such is the goodness of God, all this is plainly vouchsafed to us in the gospel. And can you then despise it? Or think yourselves self-sufficient? Think, how well this religion supplies every want of our nature; and surely this one reflection will satisfy you, how greatly it is to be presumed, that it comes from The All-gracious Author of our nature.

If you enquire into past history, you will find, how well the above accounts of things correspond with fact and experience. This cannot but greatly confirm them, and should induce you to pay the greater regard and attention to them.

Though

Though, according to the scripture account of things, there never was a time absolutely without any revelation, yet 'tis certain that the less assistance the world has had from hence, the worse their extravagances and errors have been. The religion of the ancient heathens, and indeed of the modern ones, is full of these. And yet one thing deserves your notice, *viz.* the universal custom which prevailed of old of endeavouring to propitiate the Gods by bloody sacrifices. You cannot dispute this: But how can you account for it? Could reason teach such a rite? Certainly not. It would rather, if any thing, have taught the contrary. The rite shews indeed the sense men had of guilt, and their fears of punishment. And sure it tends to confirm the doctrine of revelation, which strongly intimates, that it was ordained of God soon after the fall of man, to preserve the religion and expectations of the world, and to derive it's efficacy from what is prefigured, the Great Sacrifice of the Lamb of God to be offered up in the fullness of time for the sins of it. If this be admitted, we can easily discern, that the custom was derived down to the several nations by tradition from their common ancestors; and that, as a matter of the last consequence to their comfort and virtue, it was in some sort preserved amongst them till the coming of Christ. But on any other supposition, you will find it
 impos-

impossible to give any satisfactory explanation of this matter.

If you pretend, that gratitude might at first have led men to offer to God the things which they set most value upon, as a tribute due to Him; besides, that you can have no proof that this is fact, it is easy to see, that, however this might account for eucharistical sacrifices of things inanimate, or of dedicating persons to His more immediate service; yet it cannot at all reach the case of those, which we have now under our view, *bloody* and *propitiatory* ones. It could never be the consequence of a sense of thankfulness to The Common Father of all, to torture and destroy, without any use, any of His Creatures.——And the earliness and universality of the custom as effectually overthrow the supposition, that it had no other rise than from mere cruelty and superstition; though these at last too far mixed themselves with it.

You will now, Sir, probably be desirous to be released for the present: Which I shall do by assuring you, that I am,

Your's very sincerely.

C

LET.

LETTER III.

Dear Sir,

IN the two former letters, we have, I trust, proceeded on sure grounds: You cannot but allow, if you well consider them, that such a revelation as the Christian is wanting and desirable; that natural religion and morality are best taught in it; and that the wants of mankind are thus most adequately answered and supplied, and the distresses, which sin had reduced us to, removed in a manner most eminently consistent with God's justice and goodness.—That such a revelation was possible for Him to make, you will not surely presume to dispute. This would be denying the power of your Creator, and supposing that He, who gave us all the faculty of communicating our thoughts to each other, cannot assist and direct our minds, by conveying to us any fresh portion of light, when He pleases.

Let us now take one step farther. A revelation being allowed, is it most probable or fitting, that this would be granted to every individual person, or to some only for the use and benefit of others? I dare say, you will own this last to be most suitable to the dignity of The Divine Majesty, and to the ordinary methods, which He hath provided for propagating other useful knowledge—

lege— Which then would best answer the end of preserving it entire and uncorrupted, to leave it to be propagated by word of mouth, or to commit it to writing? Surely, for the same reason, this latter. It is thus all other laws and facts of importance are secured from oblivion, and transmitted down to succeeding ages. And it is thus we come at the knowledge of our religion, which is contained in the bible, and which must be intitled to the belief of every serious and impartial man, unless there be some weakness in the proof and evidence of it, which would be sufficient to overthrow the credit of any other book.

And now, having prepared the way for our belief, and shewn our holy religion to be most useful, much wanted, highly suitable to our nature, and granted in the very manner, in which a true revelation would most probably be made; all which are very strong circumstances in it's favour; let me intreat you to consider with all coolness and impartiality, the more direct and positive evidences of it's truth. And here I must remind you of its internal excellency, and it's being the most perfect scheme of doctrines and duties, which the world ever saw; of the clear account here given of the origin of the world, of the Being, Attributes, Unity, and Spiritual Nature of God Almighty, of the Immortality of the human soul, and of a future state

of rewards and punishments. I must also remind you of the purity of the Divine Law, and the perfect example of our Divine Lawgiver. All these things very powerfully recommend this System to your belief, and render it incredible, that what so compleatly contributes to the virtue and happiness of the world, should be a falsehood and imposture.

Besides, can any books be more fully proved to be genuine, than the scriptures are? Or more uncorrupt and faithfully transmitted? I know some have raised clamours on these heads, and endeavoured to throw suspicions and doubts in your mind about them. But by consulting the best authors on this subject, you may receive abundant satisfaction, and still more, as your degree of learning qualifies you more for it, of the following points. That the books of scripture, which have the names of the authors prefixed, which is the case of by far the greater part, and of all the New Testament, one epistle excepted, were written by them—that all were written early enough, to be good evidence of what they relate—that the most confessedly ancient and genuine of profane writers, though none are near so ancient as some of the scriptures, have nothing like the same attestations to their authority—and that such of them, as have been least depraved by transcribers, though none have been transcribed near so often, have not the same degree of purity,

purity, with which these in all points of moment are come down to our hands. For the various readings are not at all more, than in so great a number of copies and translations must be expected. And when you consider so great a number of copies and translations made in so many different countries and ages, and particularly those of the New Testament, made in every age since it was written; and yet agreeing in every doctrine, and almost in every material text; and where they disagree in sound, having either precisely the same sense, or one nearly as good as the other; when you consider all this, instead of being staggered, you ought to be thankful: And these very variations, instead of weakening, rather confirm the Christian faith; as shewing a peculiar care of Providence over these writings. So that it is very idle to object the uncertainty of such traditional conveyance of our religion; when, as we saw before, this is the best conveyance it can have, and when it now appears to have been actually conveyed with the utmost certainty.

And if these books are the genuine remains of Moses, the Prophets, and Apostles; you are next to consider, how far these authors are worthy of credit. And, if you are impartial, you must allow, that they are every way as truly unexceptionable, as any possibly can be; that they did not discover the least sign or quality of deceivers; that

that they manifested their sincerity in the highest manner in which sincerity can be manifested ; and that they treated of points, and recorded facts, which they could not be deceived in. (So that you must either believe these, or you can believe no writings in the world.

And if these writings are true, the consequence is short and clear, that our religion is true ; that the authors of them were inspired by God, and sent by Him to preach His will to the world ; that in proof of this they worked many important, open, undeniable miracles ; that, in particular, our Blessed Lord and Saviour, after having performed many works of this nature, which demonstrated the finger of God, and having submitted to death on the cross, on the third day rose again ; and after shewing Himself alive to great numbers, for forty days together, ascended visibly into heaven ; that afterwards several signs and wonders were done in His name, and many converts made by the assistance of The Holy Spirit, Whom, according to His promise, He sent upon His disciples, to enable them speedily to convert the world.

I will now conclude with sending every good wish, which can come from the heart of,

S I R,

Your very affectionate Servant,

L E T-

LETTER IV.

Dear Sir,

SUFFER me now to fix your attention especially on the points mentioned in the close of my last. Read over seriously the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, those of the New Testament particularly. Judge yourself; Could these be impositions on the senses? Could they be the effect of any human skill, or art? Could they, indeed, be done without the assistance of Divine Power? And were they not therefore the seals and confirmation of the pretensions of Christ and His Apostles? And can you have stronger evidence of the truth of what They taught?

If you say, in answer, that such works might be done by magic, or the power of evil spirits, I must beg you to deal faithfully by yourself, and ask you, do you really believe in such powers? If not, as I am apt to think, this is no part of your creed, give me leave to say, that in a matter of this consequence it is not right to urge any thing merely to avoid an argument, or get rid of a difficulty. — If you do believe such powers as belonging to evil spirits, yet can you believe, that those would lend their powers to destroy their kingdom, and to establish such a law as the Christian, a law of truth and righteousness? Or
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can you believe, that God would not restrain them by His own superior power, from thus unavoidably imposing upon the world, or that He would not, in such case, oppose and controul their works by more and greater done by Himself? As nothing of this nature happened with regard to the miracles of the gospel, we may be sure that the devil had no concern or share in them.

Consider then, how you can reasonably reject a revelation, which is thus undeniably proved and confirmed by such *works*, as *no man could do, except God were with him*; of works, which had also the advantage of having been long before foretold by the prophets; and which had the farther attestations of enemies themselves: As not even your old predecessors in infidelity, *Celsus*, &c. could deny the reality of the facts, (which they might easily, and would willingly have done, had these been false) but were obliged to account for them in absurd ways.

It has been, I know, of late pretended, that the constant course of nature is a stronger argument against the credibility of miracles, than any relations can be for it. — But no pretence can be more groundless. We have not from hence the least presumption against it.

Where the end proposed to be answered by miracles, is worthy of such interpositions of The Almighty, it is as reasonable to believe, that He would suspend or supersede His own general laws of nature,

as that at other times and occasions He upholds and preserves them. We do not contend for signs and wonders as granted frequently and without need or use. But we contend, that at the first publication of our religion, (as before in the delivery of the *Jewish* law, and at other times afterwards) there was great need and use of them; to awaken attention, to over-rule prejudices, and to prove the divine authority of the message delivered. Infomuch, that if Christ and His apostles had done nothing of this supernatural kind, their commission from heaven would scarce have been properly, at least not near so fully attested and evidenced: and if the Scriptures had not given us an account of miracles as done by them, it would have been a very specious objection against their pretensions.

But farther, it was not only most proper, that the Gospel should have been originally thus confirmed and propagated; but it is easy to see, that it could not have been propagated, as it was, by any other means. The known event therefore puts out of all doubt the reality of these miracles. The more you consider this argument, the more I am persuaded, you will be influenced by it. That Christianity was at first preached with an amazing success, and prevailed speedily over the then known world, is a fact, which has never been denied, nor indeed will admit of any debate.

X **bate.** The question then is, whether this suc-
 cess was owing wholly to any human authority
 and power, to any natural or acquired abilities
 of it's teachers, to any fortunate concurrence
 of times and accidents; or to the assistance of
 Heaven? Now, if this last had not been the case,
 the work must soon have come to nought, and
 + our religion been suppressed in it's birth. Every
 circumstance, humanly speaking, tended to this---
 X It's Author put to a cruel and shameful death---
 y His followers persecuted in all manner of ways,
 first by the Jews, and then for near three hun-
 dred years by the Gentiles—These followers few
 in number, low in station, most of them with-
 out learning or influence of any kind—All the
 wit, learning, eloquence, power, malice, vices
 of the world, in opposition to them—I may ap-
 + peal to yourself, if you will weigh these par-
 ticulars, whether such men could naturally either
 have expected any success, or have met with it?
 whether they could without such a miracle as the
 scriptures record, have attained the knowledge
 and ready use of so many languages, as they
 must be supposed to want and use in the exer-
 cise of their ministry in different countries?
 whether without other miracles, as well as a
 most powerful influence of God's Spirit on their
 hearers, which would be fully equivalent to mi-
 racles, they could so early and easily conquer the
 strongest

strongest prejudices, and convert numbers in all places?—How will you be able to account for all this, upon your plan? Impostors have indeed sometimes had success. But no impostors, with one tenth part of these difficulties attending them, ever had, or could have any.

False pretences to miracles are in themselves dangerous expedients, and have frequently ended in the confusion of deceivers. So they must necessarily have done at the beginning of the gospel, when they were wrought, in the most open manner, in the midst of allpowerful and subtle enemies, who could want no inclination nor opportunity to discover the cheat, had there been any, and who were dared to examine into them. As then these passed undetected, you may, you must, if you have the ingenuous disposition, with I hope to be in you, conclude, that they were the genuine effects of the hand of God, His seal set to attest the truth of our religion.

Consider seriously what has been offered on this subject by,

Sir,

Your hearty and sincere friend.

LET-

LETTER V.

I AM now sit down, Dear Sir, to set before you the other argument from prophecy, which you will do well to review, and which, notwithstanding all the dust which the enemies of Christianity have raised on this subject, you will find to stand sure and strong, and easily see the force of it in general. A prophecy, when fulfilled, may be considered as a miracle, as it plainly proceeds from the foreknowledge of God Almighty, who alone has a perfect insight into futurity. And the prophecies of Scripture are such, as no human sagacity or penetration could discover, or so much as guess at; not at all depending on any observations or experience of former ages; some of them referring to events purely casual, as far as human actions can be so; happening at a great distance from the time when they were foretold; foretold when they were least likely to come to pass; and yet most unexpectedly, punctually, and literally brought about.

Can you stand out against such evidence as this, if it can be shewn. *I hope better things of you.* And yet it may very clearly be shewn to any unprejudiced mind. In order to this, I shall desire but one concession, which surely is too reasonable to be refused; viz. that the several

veral books of scripture were written in very different ages, and by persons, who could not possibly have any communication with each other. This being granted, we fairly refer you to these scriptures themselves, and desire you honestly to compare them together. If you do this, you cannot but see in them several plain prophecies accomplished as fully, as it is possible for any to be. *Cyrus* the king of *Persia*, and the restorer of *Jerusalem*, was mentioned by name by *Isaiah*, who wrote above two hundred years before him. *Daniel* has set down the several successions of the empires so very exactly and distinctly, that his account looks more like an history than a prophecy; and in order to evade the force of it, some have without the least grounds or reason supposed it to have been written after the events. Without reason, did I say? Nay in defiance of it. For indeed it was translated into Greek long before one of the principal events, the profanation of the temple by *Antiochus*; and it was also well known through the world, and often quoted, long before others of them; such as the coming of Christ, and the destruction of *Jerusalem* by the *Romans*—What can you think of these things? Could they happen by chance? Or could any human judgment and prudence reach so far, and foresee things at such a distance with such certainty? Both suppositions are equally incredible. And what then is left for

you to suppose, but that, which is indeed the truth, that in these instances these prophets *spake as they were moved by The Holy Ghost*? And if in these instances, what reason can you give for distrusting their pretensions in general?

But let us confine our thoughts to those particular prophecies, by which the truth of christianity is more immediately evinced. Several, which were given long before, were fulfilled in And by our Blessed Lord : And some, which He spake in His life time, have been eminently fulfilled since. Let me intreat you only to read over the fifty third chapter of Isaiah, and also the accounts of Christ's death in the New Testament ; and say, whether these two do not in the most surprizing manner tally and refer to each other. Every attempt to evade this prediction, or to apply it to any other person, has offered great force and violence to the words—Whence then could Isaiah so many centuries before have been able thus literally to describe this great event, together with the design, ends and consequences of it, but by the suggestion, of The Spirit of God? Or how could Christ thus literally answer this character (a character, which, we may presume, no impostor would chuse to answer) if He had not been the Person so long before pointed out?

Again, our Lord Himself foretold the manner of His own death, which He had not the

choice of; and the time of His resurrection, which no uninspired man could suspect; the desertion of His disciples, and in a very circumstantial manner the denial of St. *Peter*, when they did not think themselves capable of such guilt; the mission of The Holy Ghost, and the success of His religion; all which required a knowledge more than human.—These particulars are taken from the Evangelists, whose veracity we saw before.—As is also another instance, on which great stress has been deservedly laid, His prophecy of the entire and approaching destruction of the temple, when no such thing was feared or apprehended, when the building was in all its glory and beauty, and the nation in perfect peace and quiet. The gospels, wherein this prophecy is recorded, were written several years before the event happened. And how exact and literal the completion was, you may learn from the account of *Josephus*, who has left us an history of this matter; a *Jew*, then upon the spot, who had nothing less in his view, than to confirm the authority of Christ, or the truth of His gospel.

How you can get over such plain proofs as these, I cannot imagine. Here could be no fraud, nor mere accident. The intentions of the predictions, and the fullness of their accomplishment, are equally clear. And the undeniable consequence of this is, that our Lord was

indeed *The Prophet, which should come into the world.*

To return to those prophecies, which went before of Him——If there are some of these, which cannot well be mistaken; the visible chain and connection, which is between them all, and appears to hold through all the intermediate ages, from the fall of man to the coming of Christ, deserves your more especial attention, and if well considered, must prove the strongest confirmation of your faith. However this may have been ridiculed, it has not been disproved, nor can be disproved. And surely, this view of them, as delivered in different times, and by persons of different characters, and yet as all aiming and pointing to one and the same Person, and one and the same future dispensation, must let in light upon the whole, give a considerable force to each particular, and point out to us the divinity of their common original, and the high value and honour thus stamped upon our holy religion.

Such is our evidence from prophecy. And can all this be overturned by the application of a very few prophecies to Christ in the New Testament, which are supposed not to belong to Him? This objection has had more stress laid upon it, than it deserves. And the difficulty has been much aggravated. No allowances have been made for the distance of times; the loss of some helps which most probably would have

have afforded light in this enquiry ; the sentiments of the *Jews* then ; the difference between bare accommodations of passages, and fulfilling of predictions ; the double senses and views, in which several prophecies may be justly considered ; and other things urged by men of learning to clear the point. These you may consult, if you have leisure and inclination ; and I dare say, it will be to your satisfaction. Let me only at present remind you, first, that, where you see the particular accomplishment of so many plain and undeniable prophecies, you ought not to be staggered, though you should not be able to see through all the difficulties, which have been raised about three or four applications of passages in the Old Testament ; and secondly, that having all reason, both on account of miracles and prophecy, to believe the Evangelists to have been inspired by The same Spirit, who inspired the prophets, you may justly acquiesce in the sense which they have affixed to these, as being one true meaning, originally designed by That Spirit, though the words appear to have been immediately applicable to some other person or thing. But enough of this.

I cannot likewise but earnestly recommend to your consideration, the nature of the Mo-
saic law ; which will shew you how properly it
is filed by St. Paul *a schoolmaster to bring us*

unto Christ; as the several institutions and parts of it will appear designed and appointed by God to be so many types, figures, and adumbrations of Him and His gospel, to continue for a time only, in order to prevent the universal spreading of idolatry, and to prepare the way gradually for the opening of this final and perfect revelation. In this view of things, you will easily see the reasons of many points, which, if regarded in themselves only, you may perhaps think unaccountable, if not unworthy of being commanded by God.

In short, if you will enlarge your thoughts, you will be satisfied, that almost from the beginning of the world, God had a view to the christian dispensation; that His chief institutions had more or less a relation to this; that His prophecies pointed to this as their center, and unfolded and manifested it more and more; till the world was prepared to expect it, having had time to feel and lament the gross ignorance, blindness, darkness, and corruptions, which this last and best gift of heaven was designed to remedy, and for which glorious end it is so admirably qualified—What a noble idea must this give you of our religion? And how can you any longer reject or despise it?

I have now, Sir, only room to add, that I am

Very unfeignedly Yours.

L E T.

LETTER VI.

Letters of this kind admit no compliments or ceremony. I shall therefore, my friend, without any such interruptions, pursue the thread of my reasoning. In my last letters I have endeavoured to throw into a short compass the chief evidences of the christian religion, which I think will bear no reasonable contradiction; nor admit any substantial answer. What we before saw to be so greatly wanted and desirable, we have now the pleasure to find convincingly proved. Our religion recommends itself by its *internal excellency* to all serious, sober, good persons—The Scriptures, in which it is contained, are as evidently *genuine*, as books can be—The authors are every way most *worthy of all credit*—They were also *inspired*, and worked *miracles*, by a power derived to them from God The Author of their commission—The common course of nature is no argument against the proof of miracles wrought on such an important occasion—The *swift propagation* of our religion is itself a proof, that it had the assistance of miracles—False pretences to these must at first have suppressed it.—A farther strong proof of it is, the *fulfilling* of many express *prophecies*, both of the old prophets, and of our Lord; and especially an apparent *chain and connection* of predictions

tions all terminating in Him; which must be vastly stronger, than they are, if taken separately. For the enumeration of many particulars forms a more certain description, than that of a few: And a long succession of facts done, all pointing to one end, is a much surer proof, that it hath always been in view, than any evidences unrelated to each other.---Lastly, the whole *Mosaick law* evidently looks forward to the dispensation of the gospel.

These several particulars, thus united in forming one grand evidence, has been in some measure laid before you. It cannot be expected, that full justice should be here done to them. I chose to mention them in this manner, rather than refer you to such books as have treated of them at large. However, I most earnestly beseech you not to content yourself with this imperfect representation, but according to your leisure and abilities, for your fuller conviction, to have recourse to some of those many excellent treatises, where these points are fully considered, and some of which may easily be in any one's hands.

A fair enquiry and examination, you may be assured, is what we Protestants are no enemies to. Nay we think it the duty of every serious man, according to the best of his abilities and opportunities, to make it, and to be directed accordingly. It is the neglect of this impartial search

search, which we complain of, as a chief reason of the prevailing of loose notions among us. Men, who are not fixed in the grounds of their religion, and will not enquire into *the reasons of the hope that is in them*, are apt too hastily to imbibe any infusions or objections against it, and to fall away in time of temptation. If you read only on the side of infidelity, and will not give a candid and equal attention to such answers as vindicate the Christian scheme, how can you excuse yourself from the charge of bigotry? How can you expect to be free from doubts and difficulties, to the disadvantage of Christianity, when the door is so widely opened by you, to the admission of these, and no care is taken by you to deliver your mind from them? And, what is a consideration of more weight, how can you hope for the pardon of those errors and prejudices, which you thus voluntarily bring upon yourself, and which you might so easily avoid by making a due use of those faculties, which God has given you, and requires you to guide yourself by?

Prejudices of education you are often talking against. And though we think it right, that the mind should be at first seasoned with a just regard to truth and virtue, to preserve it from an opposite bent, which else it would receive among the manifold temptations and attacks of a loose and wicked world; yet we no way fear or decline
the

the strictest examination of Christian notions and principles; we rather invite and press men to this, as they are capable of it; we cannot doubt, but that the more honest and sincere they are in this point, the more they will be convinced of the certainty of our faith, which has approved itself to so many great and good, inquisitive and disinterested men, of the laity as well as the clergy.

But since you complain of prejudices, are there no prejudices among your sect against Christianity, which lye in the way of your embracing it, and unreasonably byass your minds? I am persuaded there are: And as you may not of yourself discern all these, and much less the falsehood and vanity of them; I cannot but think it my duty on this occasion, to lay before you what I apprehend to be some of the chief, with proper guards and precautions against them.

And first, I would mention an undue stress laid on mere *difficulties*. That there are such in the Scriptures is acknowledged. And, because these cannot be all perfectly cleared up, and every question relating either to the counsels of God Almighty, or to any points of faith answered; you are apt to magnify these into objections against the truth, and to triumph, as if you had at once confuted it---But sure you should consider; what right you have to *such entire* satisfaction in all these matters; or whether in
the

the nature of things it be possible for you to attain it. There is a curiosity, which ought to be restrained, as diving into points far beyond the reach of human search. Common Christians must take many things for granted, and trust to the skill and authority of others, whom they have cause to esteem able and honest, where they are absolutely unqualified to decide for themselves. Nor can this be justly called credulity, but a becoming modesty and deference to persons of superior knowledge; which in every other case in life is allowed to be necessary and laudable; for without it we must be subject to innumerable inconveniences and dangers.

If you will trust no body but your self, and never see with any eyes besides your own; you must be in one of the most unhappy conditions in the world, a state of endless scepticism or universal doubt, a state of groundless undistinguishing suspicion; which must cut you off from almost every comfort in life, and deprive you of almost all useful knowledge. It will be very little satisfaction indeed, which you will be thus able to find. Let me then beg you, in regard and compassion to your own peace, carefully to banish this disposition.

But farther, even supposing you were able to see clearly without help every thing that is visible by human eyes, you cannot reasonably expect to see every difficulty, which may be started
by

by vain and wanton men about religion, thoroughly answered. You certainly can have no reason to expect this here, any more than in other subjects. And you cannot mention any one science, not even the mathematics, where there are not many difficulties, which have puzzled all the wisdom, and baffled all the enquiries, of the closest thinkers. And can it then be matter of wonder, if the like should happen in the highest subject, so immediately relating to the designs and dispensations of The Almighty?

Very many of the difficulties of Scripture have been fully cleared up by the helps of learning; and more probably will be hereafter, as some may be supposed to be left for the trial and exercise of the faith and industry of every age. Some are owing to the antiquity of the writings, the shortness of the narrations, our ignorance of some ancient customs, and the great difference of the eastern style from ours. All these will unavoidably create some *things hard to be understood*; which however need not discourage any good person, who will find all the necessary articles of faith and practice revealed with sufficient clearness and certainty.

Think not, that by warning you against paying too much regard to mere difficulties, I desire or intend to lead you blindfold, or to prevent your considering the grounds of your religion. My whole design is to direct your enquiries aright,

right, and to persuade you to begin them at the right end, with the consideration of the positive evidences of our most holy religion. If these should not be sound and good, you have a right to reject it. But difficulties alone will not overturn it, if those proofs should appear, as I am assured they will on every impartial examination appear, strong and satisfactory, and liable to no just contradiction. If then you have a prior and greater regard to particular difficulties, than to the general positive evidences of Christianity, no wonder you are always unsettled, fluctuating, and wavering. But if you will pay a due attention to these evidences in the first place, your mind will have something steadfast to rest upon; the difficulties may perhaps vanish on farther enquiry; or you will see reason however to overlook them, as being of no weight or force in comparison with the others.

Believe me, Sir, to be ever ready to serve you in all good offices, as

Your real servant and friend.

L E T T E R VII.

Dear Sir,

THE prejudices against our religion is a very copious and fruitful subject, and will afford me matter for several letters more.

E

I shall

I shall at present consider two of them, those against *mysteries* and *positive duties*. The first is much akin to the former already treated of. With many the mysteries of our religion may be thought the great objection. Much idle declamation has been employed against them; and the absurdity of believing what is above our reason, and cannot be comprehended by us, loudly pretended.

Now we cannot compliment you with giving up any one of these mysteries, because we find them revealed in Scripture; and we must believe universally whatever these sacred oracles teach us---But, then we beg you to reflect, that they ought not to set aside any revelation. If indeed they contained any contradictions to our senses or understanding, or to those notions of the nature and attributes of The Supreme Being, which our reason teaches us, they would be real objections indeed. But if they only suppose some points, which our reason cannot fathom, nor perfectly explain; which is the whole of the case; I cannot see why, if revealed, they should not be admitted. The truth may surely be of importance enough to be revealed by God: And yet the whole manner and circumstances of it may not be necessary, probably not possible, for us to understand. In this case, we believe so far as it is revealed, and no farther. We own our

our ignorance, where God has not been pleased to grant us light and information.

To explain this by instancing in a chief article of this nature, that of the Trinity. This our reason could not have taught us. But what objections has reason against it, now it is made known? You will say, you cannot comprehend it. Well, and can you decently expect to comprehend a doctrine so immediately relating to the manner of the existence of your Creator? Can you comprehend those attributes of His, which you can now prove in the use of your understanding? And should you not willingly receive His farther instruction concerning Himself, though your understanding be much too weakly to take in the whole knowledge of His Divine Essence?--Were you called upon to believe, that three are one in the self same respect, you would have reason to remonstrate. That Three Persons are One Person, or Three Gods One God, is a contradiction in terms. But that Three Persons are One God, is none at all. So far then we may believe on the authority of Scripture. But the *manner how* They are One God, neither has the Scripture taught us, nor is this any article of our faith.

It can be no way injurious to such imperfect and fallen creatures as we are, to be required to humble and submit our reasons to the authority of our Maker, and to the obedience of faith.

There is ~~not~~ a more vain and arrogant pretence, than to suppose them the measure of all truth. If you will discard all mysteries, you must discard natural religion itself. For this also contains many inexplicable points. So indeed does the study of nature, which is also full of them. So that this absurd principle, if followed, will lead you to disbelieve even what you daily see. And 'tis not possible more effectually to confute it.

Let me beg you then on the other hand to discard all immodest and extravagant notions of the sufficiency of your own reason. Sufficient indeed it is for the uses and purposes, for which God granted it; and to these ends you should thankfully and honestly employ it. But it never was designed to penetrate into all mysteries and all knowlege, and to *find out* the deep things of *The Almighty to perfection*. And if you will but coolly reflect, how many things you are ignorant of, how very few or none you understand thoroughly, even of those which daily occur to your senses; you cannot reject the Scriptures, on account of the mysteries contained in them.

Nor will you be inclined to take any exceptions against *positive duties*. A dislike to these is another prejudice or stumbling block in your way. A few such our religion has enjoined. And because they were not discovered by human reason, therefore the pride of human reason has represented them as vain and unnecessary.

Now

Now this pretence is absolutely subversive of the authority of God, and inconsistent with that regard, which is in all cases undeniably due to His known will. Whether this will is the sole ground of obligation, properly so called, or not; as it truly appears to be; yet it must ever be looked upon as one great principle and foundation of it. He has the most absolute right to our service. Whatever He commands we ought implicitly to obey, even without the consideration of any other reason, than because He has commanded. If He should be pleased, merely for the trial of our sincerity and duty to Him, to lay any law upon us, which we could not see the fitness and reasonableness of; in this case it becomes us to submit and observe it without any disputing or reluctance. And in all cases we may be very sure, that He has the wisest and best reasons for whatever He does, whether we are capable of perceiving them, or not.

Pray consider, how you usually act towards your own servants. When you give them any orders, do you always communicate to them the reasons of such orders? Would you be pleased, if they should refuse to obey you, till they were convinced of the fitness and propriety of your injunctions? Would not every pretence of this kind be looked upon, and that most justly, as an insolent disowning of your authority and power over them? If you then, who are far from

being either infallible or perfectly good, would resent the disobedience of your inferiors in this case; how can you think it your right to be informed by God of all the reasons of His divine commands? Will you so far curtail His authority, as to suppose it to be, in any respect, less than what you may have over your fellow creatures? Nay, will not the considerations of His Infinite Power and Wisdom and Goodness, that He is equally incapable of being the least mistaken in what relates to your true happiness, and of being at all willing to mislead you, incline you to trust and submit to His guidance, without the least doubt or reserve, whether you could have found out the way your self or not? Surely they must, if your mind be sufficiently humble and ingenuous.

If you should be taught to object, (for perhaps you may have some Masters whom you follow pretty implicitly,) that you can no otherwise be satisfied of the reality of such commands, but by having the reasons of them laid before you; I desire you to reflect, whether this be not destroying the possibility of any revelation, and therefore, as this has been proved before, whether the plea can deserve any admittance? Of revelation, I mean, properly so called, as distinct from what is discovered to us in the exercise of our natural faculties---

For if God can reveal any point which was unknown to us before, He may, for ought I can see,

see, reveal to us in general, that for the future He expects the performance of such and such duties from us, without communicating at the same time the reasons of them. These we have no right to demand. Without them He has the strictest right to our obedience. And if He should communicate them, still the proof of His revelation will not rest on them, but on other points, which would equally prove it to you, though you should not discern the fitness of it. What these points are, you will easily learn by recollecting what was before urged concerning the evidences of the Christian revelation.

Hitherto I have been arguing with you upon your own principle, that the positive duties enjoined in Scripture are such, as no man could ever discern the reasons of. Your objection against them, even in this view of things, has been shewn to be weak and ungrounded--- But I must now go farther, and say, the principle itself is wrong. Plain reasons and uses appear, even at so great a distance of time, for many of the positive injunctions in the Old Testament; which affords a strong presumption, that the reasons and uses of the rest were clear, when they were delivered, and indeed long after. And with regard to the few orders of this kind found in the gospel, with which only we are immediately concerned; God has dealt with

us far beyond what we could have demanded. Though we could not have originally discovered them, yet we can now see many reasons of their being enjoined, and many real and great advantages, which will accrue to us from the conscientious observance of them. This is a light, which perhaps you never considered them in, and which must soon convince you, how extremely groundless your prejudices here are.

It has been already shewn, that a new covenant of grace and mercy was much wanted by weak and sinful men; and that Christianity, which contains it, is true. And do you not then see the fitness and reasonableness of placing a due faith and confidence in The Great Mediator of this new covenant; of solemnly entering into it, accepting and embracing it's terms, stipulating to perform our own parts of it; and also of renewing it from time to time, commemorating the great act of love and condescension, by which it was established, imploring pardon of our breaches of it, and receiving to the comfort and refreshment of our souls the several benefits of it, which can be enjoyed here, as well as strengthening our title to, and our hopes of the reward it promises hereafter—in a word, beginning, keeping up, cementing, and increasing that holy union and friendship, to which, notwithstanding our unworthiness, God has so mercifully admitted us with Himself? Can any

any thing be more proper, or indeed, more moral, than these several acts of repentance, faith, love, and gratitude? And yet these are the inward and spiritual parts of the positive duties required by our religion, which are so unjustly complained of. And surely, such easy, unexpensive, natural, and significant signs and ceremonies, as the washing with water, and eating bread and wine, when used to these excellent purposes, in obedience to our Lord's command, ought not to create any difficulty with you, cannot be considered as any burden, nor can with any shew of reason be disliked by you. And, to conclude this point, however some may have affected to represent positive and moral duties as at variance, and to frame unrighteous and mischievous comparisons between them; yet they both, in their natural tendency, and in the design of their Supreme Author, highly strengthen and promote each other.

The great importance of these points we have had before us must procure me your excuse for the length of this letter. I am, Sir,

Your faithful and humble servant.

L E T.

LETTER VIII.

Dear Sir,

WE will now, if you please, go on to consider another prejudice, which you have taken up against the faith of the gospel, which is, because it is *not universal*; several ages having passed, before it was made known to the world; and a very great part of the present known world being still ignorant of it, or in opposition to it. There is no topic, which your writers have laid greater stress upon than this. You imagine, christianity supposes an inequality or partiality in God's dealings with mankind, which you cannot digest.

But christian writers have answered this plea in the fullest manner. Some of the chief things insisted upon in opposition to it, I shall take the liberty to suggest to your consideration; begging you to have recourse, if dissatisfied still, to some of the defences of our religion, which have been published, for a larger explication of them. Consider then, I beseech you, how unreasonable, how presumptuous it is to expect to understand all the reasons of God's government of the world, and what room there is to suspect your own judgment in matters of this high nature.—Consider, that though God's justice and holiness will never permit Him to make any of His creatures miserable

miserable, without or beyond their desert; yet provided this rule be observed, as it always undoubtedly is and will be, He hath full right to place them in what rank of being, and assign to each of them what advantages or disadvantages He pleases; and that *as no one can say unto Him, what dost thou?* So it can in no case be an objection, that we imagine, He ought to have done otherwise---Consider, that, whereas the present objection supposes, that in points of religion at least, all men would be placed on a level, with the same opportunities and advantages; you must, as a deist, be obliged to confess this supposition to be groundless, and that, though there had never been any revelation, there are many differences among men in these respects; differences of station, reason, and abilities, which in this case would create a great difference of obligation, and render the duty of some much wider, and their lot much happier, than that of others---Consider, that, if Christianity be false, because it is not universal, so must the law of nature and reason itself be, which never in fact universally prevailed throughout the world: This you must own, unless you will say, that idolatry, polytheism, and many superstitious and unnatural practices, are parts of it---Consider, that the world before Christ, having much abused the light they had received, could have no claim to any other; and yet that they never were without
some

some advantage from God's revelations. One of which, though delivered to the Jews particularly, came to the knowledge of some of the wisest searchers after truth among the old heathens, who probably drew some of their best instructions and doctrines from this sacred fountain. And the promise of a Redeemer, and His victory over our greatest enemy, was made immediately after the fall of man, to support the hopes and religion of the world; from whence, as well as from other considerations, we have all reason to believe, that the atonement by the death of Christ reached back to the beginning of transgression, and is as truly extensive in its view and design, as sin ever was or can be in its progress; and that for the sake of this atonement, every sincere good person, who made it his business and endeavour to walk according to the light which had been vouchsafed him, or who in time repented of any sins he might fall into, was accepted by God, and found that pardon and reward at His hands, which his best works could not of themselves have intitled him to---Consider, that if men have very different talents granted them, as surely they have in respect to fortune, body, and mind; they will be judged by different rules, and not be accountable for transgressing any law, which was not, or could not be, known to them---Consider that the dispensations

pensations of God are usually gradual, and that natural things do not arrive at their full growth and improvement at once; and therefore that it should be no wonder, if the discoveries of Divine Grace are analogous to them. This may rather be looked upon as a proof and confirmation of their truth---Consider, that the full publication of our religion was most wisely deferred, till the bitter fruits of sin and corruption had universally shewn themselves for the conviction of mankind; till the insufficiency of other remedies for the recovery of human nature had appeared; till the world had been taught and prepared to expect and embrace it by a long series of prophecies; and till the most open and general circulation of it through the earth was made easy by the continual intercourse, which the greatness of the Roman Empire had caused between the most distant nations---Consider, that if the gospel is not universally extended over the world, this cannot be its fault, which was designed by its Blessed Author for the reformation and benefit of all; but is owing to the vices of men, and to the ill use of their natural liberty; that many nations, who had formerly received Christianity, have since forfeited and rejected it; that many are still voluntarily ignorant of it; and that, as God generally makes use of the actions of men to promote His own great and glorious designs, so the true use we should draw

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from that ignorance, and the stubborn prejudices, which still subsist against our faith, is, to be more wary and unexceptionable in our own conduct, and to take all lawful and prudent methods of spreading the light and influence of the gospel as widely as possible; that so this objection may in time be wholly removed, and God's *ways known upon earth*, and His *saving health among all nations*---Consider lastly, what an high, aggravated, and dangerous degree of ingratitude it is in you, who have been, so far beyond your deserts, favoured with the knowlege of Christianity, whilst so many others have been fast bound in ignorance and error, to complain as it were of your own happiness, and to make this more abundant mercy of Heaven to you the ground and matter of your objection? The teaching of the truth, if you will hearken to it, may be your great and distinguishing felicity. It will lead you through this world in peace and comfort, and insure to you the exceeding and eternal enjoyments of the other. But, if you go on to despise this privilege, remember, that your condition hereafter will be much worse than that of the heathens, in proportion to that fuller light which was offered you, that greater improvement which you might in consequence of it have made, and that higher glory, which you might have secured and inherited. *It were better for you*

not to have known the way of life and righteousness at all, than after you have known it, so groundlessly and contemptuously to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you.

These several considerations, set down as they occurred without any exactness of order or method, I most earnestly recommend to your perusal and study; being fully persuaded, that they cannot fail, unless overlooked, of getting the better of this prejudice against our religion. I shall no longer detain you at present, than to assure you of my being with all sincerity,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

LETTER IX.

HAve you not, Sir, taken up a dislike to our religion by supposing it an enemy to *freethinking*? Have you not been deluded by the frequent boasts which have been given out, as if your sect were the only freethinkers, and all believers of Christianity were credulous bigots, not daring to examine and judge for themselves, but swallowing greedily every superstitious tale, which has been established and delivered down by their ancestors?

Such reproaches we see every day thrown out by those, who would subvert any ancient truths, or recommend any novel singularities. But if you are in earnest, you will not be led away by mere words. Freethinking, if rightly understood, well becomes all sober and rational enquirers. It consists in an ingenuous and liberal and candid examination of such points as may be offered to us for our assent, and after using aright the several helps and means of information, in following the determination and judgment of our minds. This then is contrary to a stupid and blind neglect of all enquiry,—to an improper manner of enquiry—to reading on one side only—to demanding more evidence than the point will bear—or to rejecting it, when once proved, on account of difficulties. One possessed with this temper will neither be superstitious and credulous, nor yet vain, assuming, hunting after every novelty of opinion, indulging general suspicions and doubts, wishing to find religion false, blind to its excellencies, searching only to meet with some flaw or error in it, delighted with any idle sarcasms and ridicule against it.

According to this right and sound description of the freethinker, you have no reason to appropriate this specious title and character to your sect; nay, you have no right to it at all, if we
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may judge from the practice of your most favoured writers; who not only abound in the most ludicrous buffoonery, in the grossest misrepresentation, and in the falsest quotations; but assume a liberty of thinking free from all rules and restraints of reason and argument, and scruple not to oppose the greatest authorities without the least reason, nay to contradict the common sense of mankind, without the least necessity.

In opposition to such undue methods of considering things, and judging about them, let me earnestly press you to a cool and unbiassed examination. We are far from being enemies to this. We desire only a fair and full hearing, and that you will give an equal attention to our answers and defences, as to the objections started against us. Then we trust, the truth and justice of the Christian cause will shew itself. You will find no principles of slavery or superstition contained in it. You will find sufficient satisfaction in all points, which you are concerned to know and believe.

Indeed, it will be in vain for you to expect to have your curiosity gratified by the discovery of any new system of belief. The subject will not admit of innovation. All the true articles of Christianity have been long since, and once for all, revealed: Neither can we add to, nor less-

fen them. The word of God is the standard of points of faith; and all farther pretences of new modelling or reforming them must be vain and impious, as they are unprofitable and endless.

If then you would be truly a freethinker, I must conjure you to be very serious in your searches after the truth, and to abhor all methods of treating it contemptuously and wantonly; for they are utterly inconsistent with the infinite importance of it. Use your reason as freely as you please; but be sure to use it soberly and modestly. Delight not in contradicting received notions, because they are received. Allow arguments on the side of Christianity the same force, as they have on other subjects. Expect not mathematical evidence, where moral only can be had. And above all, take care, that no petulance of wit, no unbecoming satire or defamation deceive or prejudice you—Having thus *proved all things*, you will be prepared and qualified to forsake any errors, which may have been infused into you, and for the future to *hold fast what is good*.

Prejudices *against the Clergy* have also, it is to be feared, much conduced to lead you from the faith of the gospel. It is quite natural, that this should be the consequence of them. The enemies of our religion know it well, and accordingly they have omitted no opportunity,

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no way, of instilling them into your mind. The faults of a few have been industriously and maliciously improved into a charge against the whole profession. And this again has been most unreasonably made an objection to the doctrines taught. *Priests of all religions* have been in defiance of common sense and experience represented as *the same*. And you are taught to guard against whatever they can say, by being told, that they do not write or speak out of any conviction of the truth, but merely because it is their trade and calling, and because their subsistence and profit depends upon it.

Inveterate as this prejudice is, can you think it just? Be so fair as to review it. I am far from defending any vices or irregularities among the Clergy : I readily agree, that such are more inexcusable in them, than in other men. And it would be a miracle, if there were no instances of this sort, considering their numbers, the infirmity of human nature, and the general prevailing corruption. But I am far from seeing reason to think, that this order of men is worse than any other. Nay I believe, on a fair comparison they would be found in general peculiarly strict and exemplary in their morals and behaviour, and very little to deserve your censures and contempt. However, is there any appearance of connection between their personal

nal goodness, and the goodness of the cause they maintain and teach? Cannot the Christian religion be true, though the preachers of it were wicked men? Must men's principles be of course as bad as their lives?—I appeal to your self. Do you not discern a plain difference between these things? And therefore should you not in conscience and justice confine your exceptions and blame where they are due?

Neither is that other part of the prejudice at all better founded. The state has indeed annexed several emoluments to the profession of the ministry; which is a strong argument of the usefulness and value of this institution. But should this tempt you to abuse their religion, as priestcraft? or, to imagine, that they all are so very vile, as thus solemnly, for lucre's sake, to teach falsehoods, which they know to be such? Is this your boasted benevolence? Surely one ingredient in it ought to be a common degree at least of candour.

Let me ask you, do you reason so in other matters? The practitioners in both faculties of law and physic are maintained by their practice. To some superior stations, in the former, the government has assigned high honours and rewards. But would you on this account despise their opinions, advices, and instructions? Is it not a receiv'd maxim, that the skilful in every
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art are to be consulted and confided in? And yet they in general live by their respective arts: You are therefore only desired to extend the same equity to the clergy, and to have the same regard for your souls, as you have for your bodies and fortunes. And then, I dare say, we shall hear no more of this objection.

I cannot forbear confirming what I have said on this point by the words of a very great and noble writer, which I recommend to your consideration. He speaks of ‘ an unworthy conspiracy, that was never before entered into, against any established church, in undervaluing, whatsoever is written by any clergyman, how learned and virtuous soever, in defence of it; as if he were a party, and spoke only in his own interest; so that they, who would undermine it, by all the foul and dishonest arts imaginable, have the advantage to be considered as persons engaged in that account, merely and purely by the impulsion of their consciences, and for the discovery of such dangerous errors, as are dangerous to the souls of men; whilst they, who are most obliged, and are best able to refute those vain and malicious pretences, and to detect the fraud and the ignorance of those seditious undertakers, are looked upon as men not to be believed, at least partial, and that all they say is said on
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' their own behalf. This is a sad truth, and
 ' a new engine to make a battery, at which
 ' atheism may enter without opposition——
 ' God forbid, that this scarecrow should im-
 ' pose silence upon, or seal up the mouths of
 ' any learned and worthy Clergymen, who should
 ' open them the wider for this combination,' &c.
Lord Clarendon's Animadversions against Cressy,
 p. 13, 14.

Here you have the sentiments of a most wise
 and judicious layman; which, if they have a
 proper influence over you, must conquer this
 prejudice against the gospel, must engage your
 regard to the ministers of it, *for their work's*
sake, and incline you constantly and humbly to
 resort to the assemblies of the faithful, and to
 receive the benefits, which are there commu-
 nicated. You are in no danger of being led
 into any superstitious errors by their means;
 while you have the Scriptures open in your hands,
 and are desired to try their doctrines by this
 rule, and to reject every thing contrary to it.

In this I earnestly hope and desire, that you
 will agree with,

Dear Sir,

Your undoubted friend and servant.

L E T-

LETTER X.

THE two next prejudices, which I shall beg you to consider with me, are those arising from the *false pretensions* to inspirations and miracles, which have thrown a discredit on those we lay a stress upon; and the *abuses* of religion, and even of the Christian, to the purposes of superstition and cruelty—It is a great part of our wisdom and security in life to distinguish between pretences and realities; and in no point more than in religion. That there have been notorious forgeries obtruded, and gross corruptions practised, under the cover of this sacred name, cannot be denied, and is much to be lamented. But can you from hence conclude, that these are to be charged to our religion, which discountenances and forbids them all, under the highest penalties? If abuses of things are to destroy our regard for their real authority or use, where will this end? Reason must be at this rate discarded; so indeed, must every thing else, which is valuable. For all these have been either through indiscretion or fraud counterfeited or abused.

On the contrary, these false pretences and abuses are in some measure a proof and confirmation of the reality and true use of Christianity. What for instance, could so probably induce any

one to lay a groundless claim to inspiration and miracles as the knowledge, that there had been persons favoured with these, who had accordingly obtained a just esteem in the world? Had not this been the case, it is hardly probable, that any considerable person would have attempted to impose upon men in this respect, or have aimed at the like esteem by methods, which must then have appeared so unlikely to succeed, being quite opposite to common experience, and receiv'd opinions. And if many pretences have been discovered and confuted, this is rather an argument, that, where the strictest examination has been allowed, and no discovery of any falsehood made, the claim ought to be yielded to and received.

The whole therefore, which the view of falsehoods should move you to, is to put you upon your guard, to make a proper enquiry and just distinction; but it must be very weak, as well as wrong, to reject, or even to dislike, all other pretensions on account of these. This is not using your reason, nor being determined by argument. When therefore long lists of impositions are laid before you, you must not think the worse of the claims of our Lord and His apostles because of them; but should consider, whether these claims are not in some material circumstances different from them; whether

ther the same objections lye against them both, and the one can be overthrown as easily as the others. If this should not be the case, as you may easily be satisfied, it is not; you must receive from hence no ill impressions against our religion; nor involve this in the same condemnation with such cheats as deserve it.

Superstitions indeed and persecutions have too much plagued the christian world, and thrown a disgrace and odium on the christian name. But this is entirely unmerited and unjustifiable. The Scriptures, far from encouraging, strongly forbids every thing of this sort; and therefore the consequences drawn from such follies and crimes to the disadvantage of our faith, are only proofs of the inconsiderateness and iniquity of mankind. And bad as the mischiefs have been, which have proceeded from an unwarrantable and furious zeal; they can by no means counterballance the infinite service and advantage, which the world has reaped from the publication of the Gospel; having been thus delivered, in proportion as this hath really prevailed, from many barbarous and cruel customs, as well as other sins; from ignorance and error, in matters of the highest importance; from doubts and fears concerning our eternal state.

Under the head of abuses, I would also comprize some *excesses* of rigour, which weak and injudicious men have taught; and which may

have led you to condemn our religion as inconsistent with business and the good order of society, and subversive of the chearful and innocent enjoyment of the common comforts, which God hath provided for us in life; in short, as unreasonable, if not impracticable in persons formed and situated as we are—But these are very injurious representations of christianity, which deserves the quite contrary character, and tends to make us both useful and agreeable to ourselves and each other. And you must be more weak, than the overstrict patrons of such excesses themselves, if out of a dislike of this extreme, you run into another, and much more fatal one.

And this leads me to another prejudice, which I fear has had a dangerous influence over your mind, *viz.* that arising from the many different *parties and disputes*, which have abounded in matters of religion, and even among christians themselves. You perhaps have not been inclined to enter into these, perhaps have not been capable of judging between them. And therefore, as the shortest way of determining, have at once rejected them all, as equally false or unimportant.

But pray reflect, whether such proceeding be not too rash, and how it is possible for you to vindicate it? Because there have been, and are, some errors in the christian world, will you
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to avoid these go farther still in error? The divisions among christians confirm the importance of christianity in general, which they are all agreed in maintaining. And this shews, how exceedingly strong that evidence must be, which can convince so many persons of so very different sentiments and turns of mind. Your business therefore is, to enquire where the truth lies. And common christians, who will apply properly to the Scriptures, which are open before them, may with much less difficulty, than you may imagine, discern what is essentially necessary to their salvation, and attain a competent satisfaction of mind as to the course they are to take. And indeed any of them, whatever communion they may join themselves to, act far more rationally than yourself, who throw off your religion, because all men are not of one mind about it. Tho' the journey is absolutely necessary to be undertaken, and a little enquiry would prevent any dangerous mistakes; you absurdly refuse to proceed at all, because the travellers are not every one of them agreed in the best and nearest way.

A perfect union among christians is an happiness more to be wished, than hoped for, in the present situation of things. And I beseech you, as a deist, to consider, that there is no such union of opinions among yourselves. You disagree in more points than one, of the very utmost mo-

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ment. If you are joined in any thing, it is in a desire and endeavour to demolish Christianity. But even in that it is very certain, that you have used very different, nay quite opposite means to your end. The objections and schemes of your principal writers have been very various and contradictory. Some have given up what others have laid a great stress upon. So that, upon your present principle of rejecting what men differ about, deism must also be rejected. And the atheists might retort upon you, and urge; there being so many differences between christians and deists, and among deists themselves, about religion, there is an uncertainty in this matter; and therefore we will reject the whole. Unreasonable as this is, I cannot see, but it is the very same prejudice with that, I have been examining; which therefore I hope you will not suffer to have weight with you any longer.

From the disputes among christians let us pass to their *vices*, which may well be accounted another stumbling-block in your way. These you may think a reproach, not only to us, which indeed they are, but to our holy calling itself: They may tempt you to suspect the sincerity of men's belief of it, or at least, to think it not so useful and profitable to the world, as has been pretended.

Now, however guilty and culpable bad men are in giving you such cause of offence, yet are
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you yourself free from guilt and blame in so unjustly taking it? The christian religion, you cannot but own, strictly forbids all sin and wickedness, and teaches all morality and virtue. How injurious then are you to it, when you overlook this its natural tendency, and dishonour it with the wicked lives of some of its professors! Can it be at all answerable for these? Can the best prescriptions or laws suffer in our opinion, or be thought unavailing, merely because some men are too stubborn to follow and obey them? Human liberty is not to be forced: And while it continues, there will be, who will make an ill use of it. Nor can any constitution of religion absolutely and entirely prevent this unhappiness.

Give me leave however to add, that if you will consider the lives of too many of your own sect, you will find them---I would speak very moderately—at least as strong an argument against deism; as ours are against christianity; and farther, that you, and all those, who have been subverting and undermining the belief of this law, are the last men, who should complain of the vices of the age, or make these an objection against that belief. Because such your endeavours must have much contributed to the increase of them. Whatever your intentions were, this *has* been the dreadful consequence;

and you cannot lay it too seriously to heart. By weakening the influence of christian principles, and unsettling the minds of men, you and those of your sentiments, have set them free from all restraints of conscience, and have made them impatient of those of law ; you have opened the door to admit that deluge of profaneness, perjury, and all other vices, which threaten and disturb our peace. Being taught to disbelieve and deride christianity and its awful sanctions, they have naturally enough run into a total disregard of all religion, and indulged their passions and lusts without bounds or measure.

Is it fair then to raise an argument from hence against our religion? Or, to imagine it to be useless on this account ; when nothing but the restoring its just power over the mind can sufficiently correct and put an end to these disorders? As well may you think civil government unprofitable, because there are notwithstanding it several breaches of the peace.

If you would view the genuine effects of our holy religion, you must look back to the first publication of it, when christians could appeal to their lives for the truth and good fruits of their faith and love : You must examine and admire the blessed influences of it, in the uniform and pious conduct, and in the noble and happy deaths, of numbers of good men, who have gone before.

before us. Nay even in this degenerate age, God's Grace is not left without witness, but still shines forth in very many of all stations, who go on, modestly and silently indeed, yet uniformly and exemplarily, in a conscientious practice of their duty to God and man, and in an humble expectation of the joy, which is set before them. And without all doubt, these ought to be considered as doing at least as great credit to christianity, as the others can reflect dishonour upon it.

You will do well to give all these particulars a just and impartial consideration, and believe me,

S I R,

Your assured friend and servant.

L E T T E R X L

Dear Sir,

THERE remains yet a prepossession or two to be considered, and which I shall take the freedom to lay before you with the same honest plainness I have hitherto used—We have reason to fear, that many of your opinion are prejudiced against our faith, because you know, or have heard of, *some persons of great parts and abilities,* who

who have rejected and despised it. The examples of superiors of every kind much contribute to fashion the principles, as well as conduct, of their dependents and admirers. And if great men will set the lead in any thing wrong, multitudes will follow them, though to their own ruin.

This consideration indeed ought to make men of high rank and great knowledge remarkably cautious, that they do not throw such snares and temptations in the way of their inferiors. However, if they will not be cautious, still it is your business to take care of your self, and to secure your own happiness. Remember, that men of the greatest genius, and the most shining talents, have often been guilty of proportionable imprudences and extravagances, and have both reasoned and acted very ill with regard even to common affairs of life. You cannot but see a great difference between wit and judgment; between good abilities, and a right application of them. And there is less reason for you to wonder at this, when religion is the subject in question; which the trifles and business of the world are apt to make persons too inattentive to, and which luxury and pride, to which the greatest are often subject, naturally indispose them from heartily embracing.

You must not then be led away by any great names. And indeed, it will be peculiarly inexcusable

cuseable in you to submit to so gross a delusion; as you affect to be always talking against being blinded by authority, and for using your reason. How absurdly inconsistent is this pretence with this conduct? If you are to form your faith by example, the greatest number of the greatest names are undoubtedly on the side of christianity. Whatever presumption then arises from hence, is plainly in our favour. I could point out to you several persons of the best ranks and talents, who have honourably distinguished themselves, as the friends of christianity; who could have no worldly interest to bias them, and who must be allowed to be as capable of judging, as any, that can be mentioned—Were I only to mention the names, among very many others, of a few of our own countrymen, *Raleigh, Bacon, Boyle, Locke, Newton, West, and Lyttelton*; and of *Puffendorf* and *Grotius* abroad; I might challenge you to produce any list of unbelievers, fit to be put in competition with these——But I would rather put you upon enquiring for your self, according to the best of your capacity. And when once you are convinced, that the gospel is the revelation of God to promote the comfort and happiness of men; the examples of your fellow-creatures, who despise it, how many, or how eminent soever, will surely have as little influence as they deserve. Your regard to truth, to duty, to gratitude, to your highest felicity,

felicity, must here prevail, and make you so far from being ashamed of adhering to this religion, that you will ever glory in professing and defending it, and manifest your resolution and zeal to be equal to the industry and malice of its opposers.

Lastly, there is one prejudice more, too strong to be omitted, and this is *vicious inclination*. Be not alarmed. I am not going to indulge any uncandid censures : They would be unchristian—However, in general it is certain, that a heart in any respect bad must have a most pernicious influence over our enquiries and determinations in matters of religion. This our Saviour observed, and all experience has but too well confirmed His remark—*Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*. And can it be any surprize, that wicked men should be backward to receive a law, which so strongly condemns their wickedness ; or to come to the light, which mortifies them with the view of their deformity, and terrifies them with the thoughts of their danger and punishment ? Christianity is an enemy to all sin : Hence men, who would enjoy any sin without remorse or controul of conscience, must some way or other silence and stupify this troublesome companion : And as there is no way so effectual, as by bringing our minds to a disbelief of christianity, they at last would attempt even this : And though
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the mind may not immediately acquiesce, but sometimes remonstrate and recoil, yet diversions, drinking, and above all profane books, and the company of scorers will in time get the better of every good principle, and make them triumph in an imaginary quiet and security. And hence, as the age becomes more and more corrupted, it becomes more susceptible of these ill infusions; and many, you cannot but see, not stopping at deism, wax worse and worse, and daily increase in all ungodliness.

Thus vice and ill principles are naturally the causes and effects of each other. And let me now intreat you, to enter deeply into your own heart, and to examine fairly yourself, whether it was not an indulged passion, a latent affection for something forbidden, which indisposed you at first to weigh the evidences of the gospel, and gave the objections against it a powerful prepossession—whether you do not still fear interruption in some favourite pursuit, or great discomfort of mind on account of it, by attending seriously to the truths, which our Saviour and His Apostles brought to light—whether the having been long used to despise God's authority in their practice does not prepare the way to men's questioning and rejecting it in speculation too—And whether there is not a plain connection between

‘ A youth of vices, an old age of doubts ?’

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If you can acquit your self from groſſer luſts, then pray go on to conſider, whether no undue pride and vanity rules in your heart; and whether you have not ſuffered your ſelf to be miſſed by a love of ſingularity and novelty, and a deſire to be thought more knowing than the reſt of the world, to ſtrike out of the common track, and to appear as an head or leader of a party; or whether the pride of not admitting what you cannot thoroughly comprehend or clear from all difficulties, or of not owing your knowledge to the inſtructions, or your ſalvation to the merits, of another, may not have induced you to revolt from the chriſtian faith. Theſe are dangerous temptations: And yet complying with them is ſo far from excuſing your infidelity, that it much aggravates it; the temper being itſelf vicious, and contrary to that ſpirit of humility, which the goſpel enjoyns.

If you ſhould find any thing of this nature, at the bottom of your doubts or unbelief; you muſt think this alone ſufficient to incline you to lay them aſide. For can any effects be juſtifiable, which take their riſe from cauſes ſo very corrupt?—And on the other hand, you muſt, in order to recover your true peace of mind, and the free uſe of your judgment, be very careful to diſcard theſe roots of bitterneſs; to wean your heart from the love of vice; to ſubdue all pride and vanity of ſpirit; and to put your ſoul

in such a condition, that you can consider the great doctrines of christianity without discomfort and terror, and look forwards to a future state with hope and joy. The evidences of the gospel would then soon appear to you in a very different light: And you would soon feel the happy consequences of your change of sentiments and behaviour, and be abundantly repaid for any reluctance or difficulty, which may attend the making it.

And let me add, no one would more sincerely rejoice at such a blessed conversion, than

Sir,

Your true and obedient servant.

L E T T E R XII.

I Have now finished the chief part of the task, which I set my self. Indulge me, my friend, in reading one letter more, and I have done:

Having shewn you, how perfectly reasonable, desirable, and true, our religion is; and having obviated the chief of those prejudices, which have led you to reject it; I may hope, that you will attend to a short and serious expostulation, and shall therefore conclude these addresses with laying before you the *folly*, and *guilt*, and *danger*, of your present state.

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And first, how is this reconcileable with common wisdom and discretion? He that follows his reason, must embrace christianity; though he knew nothing of it before. How very unreasonable then must it be in you to apostatise from an institution so well contrived, and so fully proved? How unworthy is it of your nature thus to chuse darkness rather than light? — And for what end do you this? The belief of our religion, you have seen, tends to compose and settle the mind. Here are all those truths discovered, without the knowledge of which life cannot well be thought desirable. Here we are taught the end of our being, plainly see our duty and business before us, and are encouraged to undertake it by the assurance of a sufficient ransom paid for our sins, and by the promises of sufficient assistance here, and of an immortal inheritance of glory to crown the whole. Surely these are the highest privileges of our nature; and it must be great want of wisdom to suffer yourself to be deprived of them. Were they less certain than they are, they are of such infinite consequence to our peace, that we should be extremely loth to part with them.

Pray remember, that your case must on all accounts be deplorable. You must be conscious of the infirmities of your nature, the strength of your passions, and the many enemies and tempta-

temptations you are continually beset with. But, if you withdraw your dependance on God's grace reached out in the gospel, what sufficient succour and defence have you to rely upon?—You must be always sensible, that you fall short of your duty to your Creator, and sometimes find yourself guilty of wilful transgressions and sins against Him. Your conscience here will rise up in judgment with you, and will severely upbraid and terrify you with the fearful expectations of His anger and punishment. But how will you be ever able to avert this, or to regain His favour? Neither your imperfect prayers nor repentances can have the least merit, nor redeem what is past, nor consequently give you certain hopes of pardon. And without these, either presumption or despair must be the horrid consequence.---You cannot, if you allow your self to think at all, but be sensible, how short and uncertain your continuance here is; that you are every moment decaying, and liable in the midst of the greatest health and strength, to ten thousand fatal accidents and distempers. And can you in these circumstances be easy at the thoughts, much more at the near approach, of death, without some secure and certain prospect of a better interest hereafter? And can you without a full assurance of forgiveness entertain such a prospect of a reward? Where then is your com-

fort, when extinction, if not vengeance, must be your dreaded portion?

Thus manifest is your imprudence, in losing the advantage of so many noble hopes, and exposing your mind to such disconcerting doubt and suspense in things of the very last moment. But farther, it is most probable, that you will not always be free from doubts, whether christianity is not true. The proofs of it are so very strong and striking, that I am persuaded they must at first be resisted with violence, and afterwards may more easily be disregarded, than disbelieved. That Christ did not work miracles, did not deliver a pure and perfect law as from heaven, did not dye on the cross, and rise again, are such negatives, as can never be proved; and therefore you can never be satisfied, that His religion is false. And hence you must be subject to misgivings and scruples, and be sometimes condemned by your own mind.

And all the present benefit of your scheme, which I can perceive, is a small short rest and tranquillity in the commission of sin. But is this any way equivalent to the loss of those glorious expectations and supports, which I have mentioned? Is it wisdom, is it not the most aggravated folly, to forfeit these, for the sake of the transitory, mixed, low, and debasing pleasures, which vice can yield? Only reflect, that you soon must dye; that should you live a few
years

years longer, yet age and weakness will force you from these satisfactions. Do this, and you must begin to look upon them in the same light, in which you will then consider them. In a word, yours is a scheme only for a few years of high health and good spirits at most. And if you will persist in it, you must dye either fatally hardened and stupid, or in intolerable remorse disappointment and despair. While a christian's faith prepares him gradually for this great event, fortifies his soul against any terrors of it, smooths the bed of sickness, lightens the burdens of age, and makes his hopes of immortality more warm and lively, the nearer he approaches to it. And now judge for yourself, which portion in wisdom you ought to chuse.

But the *folly* of your scheme will be still plainer, if you will also seriously consider the *guilt* of it. And this is very various and complicated. You thus despise God's revelation, and reject His gracious counsel against yourself. Nay you not only slight His authority, but most ungratefully refuse the offer of His highest mercies. You break the most solemn vows, which were made in your name at baptism, and which you probably have since taken upon your self. And to mention no more, you act injuriously to the rest of the world in unsettling and perplexing the minds of the ignorant and unstable, and in

weakening the force of the great sanctions of the gospel; undermining, whether you design it or not, the best foundations and securities of morality and virtue, and thus increasing the number of debaucheries, vices, confusions, and miseries among us.

The evidence of this has been laid before you. And how then can you think your infidelity to be a light or trifling thing? Or, how indeed can you be easy, while you are thus offering contempt to God, opposing and defeating His glorious and kindest designs, and disturbing the world? Accordingly, the Scriptures, supposing the truth of the gospel, and supposing likewise, that there must be some wrong byas to incline men to disbelieve it, have made our faith one condition of our salvation, and insisted on this under the very highest penalties. *How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?---He, that is ashamed of Me in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with His holy angels.---He, that believeth not, shall be damned.*

Can you read these sentences without trembling? O lay them seriously to heart; prevent the destruction which is before you; confess your past stubbornness in opposing the light of the gospel; and beg pardon of God, whom you

have so highly provok'd. Otherwise, how great is your *danger*? You thus bind your sins fast about you, and are in more desperate circumstances, than other sinners. While good principles remain in the mind, however they may lose their influence for a time, they may, and frequently do, bring about repentance and reformation at last. But, when the seeds of christianity are rooted out, what hope can there be of the recovery of a wicked person? Or what assurance of pardon, without a firm trust in our Mediator, through Whom Alone we have any promises of it made us? In the present state of spiritual sickness and weakness, which you and all in some measure feel, no longer then despise That Great Physician of souls, who only has power to heal you.

Christianity then being so truly worthy of all belief and acceptation, let me desire you in the most affectionate manner to correct and lay aside your prejudices against it, whatever they be, and ever to hold fast the profession of it without doubt or wavering. Let no false shame continue you in error: Let no ridicule or contempt, which you may apprehend or fear from your old companions on account of your change, deter you from this good resolution and happy course: Let no disgrace, which can happen to our religion in this world, make you decline asserting
and

and confessing it. *You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* from all such false shame and fear. Be earnest in prayer to God Almighty, for this is a duty of natural religion, that He would enlighten your understanding, and direct your judgment, to the discovery and acknowledgement of His sacred truth. And when once broke loose from the chains of error, and convinced and *converted* your self, study also, to reprove, exhort, bring over, and *strengthen* those, who have been your *brethren* in unbelief. Endeavour by all means to make them also partakers of the same happiness. Or, if you should fail of doing this, when you have no farther reasonable prospect of serving them in this highest manner; secure at least your own good purposes, and avoid all such company and conversation, as may in the infancy of them be more particularly likely to endanger them. This caution you owe to your own soul; as without it, 'tis not probable, that you should long be able to maintain your steadfastness.

And now, may God Almighty, who has put it into my heart to apply these very serious considerations and advices to you for your eternal benefit, give you grace to attend duly to them, imprint them strongly in your heart and memory, and *bring into the way of truth*, you, and all such, as have erred and are deceived---May He

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He grant this, to His own honour and glory,
and to our common comfort and salvation, thro'
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This is the fervent prayer of,

My dear Sir,

Your sincere well-wisher

and servant,

PHILO-CHRISTUS.

(12)

The great thing to his own honour and glory,
and to our common comfort and salvation, this
John, Christ our Lord, Amen.

This is the latest paper of

12 JU 62

in future well-wishers

and friends

JOHN CHRISTUS

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